



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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July 16, 2006
6th Sunday after Pentecost
Mark 5:21-24a,35-43
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Lamentations 3:22-33
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 30
Second Lesson: 2 Corinthians 8:1-9, 13,14
Gospel: Mark 5:21-24a,35-43

Don't Be Afraid, Just Believe

Snakes on a Plane—have you seen the commercial for that movie? Did you hear about it earlier in the year?—Samuel Jackson's movie coming out this summer—Snakes on a Plane. It's got a great title. The rest of the movie is probably ridiculous, but it has a great title, doesn't it? Snakes on a Plane—it just hits two of your greatest fears or a lot of people's greatest fears, right? Snakes, and a plane where you are trapped in and can't get out—claustrophobia and all that going together—so now you take claustrophobia and you put it together with poisonous snakes and boy, you can scare yourself silly for an hour and a half, can't you?

Fears—we all have them. Hollywood at times plays on them, right? For some people, fear of speaking in public is a terrifying thing. For some it is claustrophobia or snakes or some of these other things, but fears are there. We live with them daily and we have to face them daily. Perhaps one of the greatest fears that we try to kid ourselves about is the fear of death. Think of how our society tries to get rid of a lot of the reminders that death is approaching. Think of all the money that is spent on various plastic surgeries so we kid ourselves into thinking we are not getting older and death isn't getting closer. We live with a very real fear of death.

Even as Christians there are things about death that make us afraid, aren't there? That is not necessarily wrong, because death is a reminder of sin. If there would be no sin, there would be no death, and we all ought to be scared (in some degree) of sin and have a healthy fear of sin and its consequences. Of course, the difference is that you and I who know Jesus as Lord and Savior know who he is and what he did. We know how he did the things we could never do. We know how he took away our sins. We have a confidence that we can fall back on in the face of death that many in this world don't. That confidence isn't based on something rational. It's not based on what our eyes can see because we haven't seen the other side of death.

Jesus' words to the synagogue ruler, Jairus, are really words that we live by also as Christians, aren't they? *"Don't be afraid; just believe"* (Mark 5:36). Believe—put your faith in what you can't see, what you can't explain, what you can't reasonably demonstrate by scientific methods—just believe. Trust God's promises. Accept his Word.

What are some of the things at times that make it hard for us to believe? Sometimes the devil casts doubt on us that God really cares about us or sometimes the devil will cast doubt in our minds that God has the ability to help us—that things are so bad that

not even God could fix it. So as we consider Jairus and his daughter and what happened there by the Sea of Galilee, and as we hear God say to us, *“Don’t be afraid; just believe,”* we are reminded of two incredible truths. First, God’s desire for you and me is always what is best for us even when it seems like things are distracting him from doing it. And secondly, we see so clearly that God has the ability to provide what is best for us. He has an ability that passes our puny human understanding.

Last week in the gospel we talked about the stilling of the storm if you remember. Jesus had been teaching and he went to the other side. He was asleep. He stilled the storm. He taught the disciples something about faith. This event with Jairus happens a few days later. In between these events, he had cast some demons out of some pigs. He had taught and he had performed miracles. Now he gets back in the boat and goes back to the other side. It has been an eventful couple of days. But now he comes back and he teaches, not just his disciples or especially to the inner circle, but Jairus, and some of the other people who would have heard about it, something about the nature of what faith is.

We are told Jairus was a synagogue ruler. What that means is that the synagogue was the local area where they would come together to hear the readings of the scrolls of Scripture and things like that. They would pray together and do other various things when they would get together. He was one of the leaders of the synagogue. He saw to the care of it. He saw to it that the services were conducted regularly. He saw to it that teachers were there to teach—those kinds of things. So he was a prominent man. Evidently he was also a well-to-do man because his servants come to him with a message. Jairus would have no doubt heard Jesus, heard his teaching, seen some of the miracles that Jesus had performed up in Galilee, and he comes to Jesus because he has a problem. His little girl—he calls her his little girl, right? *“My little girl is dying.”* His little girl is 12 years old. She is not exactly a “little,” little girl anymore, but when does your child stop being your child, right? It is his little girl. His little girl is dying, literally it says at the end. He recognizes that it’s not that she is just sick and it might be death. She is on her last breaths. That is literally what it says when he comes and he makes this request of Jesus. *“My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live”* (Mark 5:23). We are not told anything Jesus said or any answer that he gave. We are told he went with him, but in that section (you notice we skipped from the end of 24 to 34), on the way there, crowds were pressing in on him and there was a woman who had a sickness of continual bleeding and she touched Jesus believing that Jesus had the power to heal her, and she was healed. And it says Jesus felt the power go out from him so he stopped and said, *“Who touched my clothes?”* (Mark 5:30). The disciples look at him like he is nuts because there are all these crowds pressing in on him and they wonder, *“What do you mean, who touched you? Everyone and their brother are touching you or trying to touch you.”* Then they get into the discussion about what had happened and how he healed her and he talked with her about her faith and all these things are going on—can you imagine if you are Jairus at that point in time? Do you think you are getting a little antsy? What would we be doing nowadays? We would be looking at our watch, right? Then we would look back at Jesus and then our watch and try to make contact with him—our way of saying *“hurry up! Let’s go! Time’s a tickin’!”* I don’t know what he did, but I have

to believe that he is getting a little antsy because he said his daughter was at the end. “Jesus we don’t have time for this!”

But Jesus who knows all things and God who does all things well takes the time to teach on the way and perform this miracle, but because he had delayed, here comes those servants with the message, “Don’t bother the teacher anymore, Jairus. Your little daughter is dead. Just let Jesus go on his way.”

We hear Jesus’ reaction, but can you put yourself in Jairus’ shoes and imagine his reactions? We might live with a fear of death at some level, but sometimes I wonder if it isn’t harder for the death of someone that we love where we can’t do anything about it no matter how hard we are trying. And as you struggle with that truth that someone you love is dying and you would do anything but you can’t, sometimes I wonder if that isn’t just as hard or harder than facing death ourselves. Ourselves, you and I, we can keep falling back on God’s promises. But as someone who loves someone who is dying, we always want to do more. We ask ourselves, “What more could I have done?” So you wonder what Jairus was going through. You wonder if he was starting to beat himself up over the fact that he didn’t go to Jesus a couple of days ago when Jesus was on that side of the lake.

We don’t know any of that. All we do know is that there seems to have been some kind of fear in his heart, some kind of knocking in his knees, because Jesus turns to him and says, “*Don’t be afraid*”—stop being afraid is what he is saying. “*Just believe*”—“believe and keep on believing in me. Put your trust in me and in my promises to you.”

As we go through life, whether it’s death or whether it’s something else that we face in life that troubles us or worries us, we go to our God in prayer because we love him and we know that he loves us and has promised to answer our prayers. But often in prayer we ask God to do a certain thing a certain way and he says “no” or he says “not now” or “not just yet.” That is hard for us at times, isn’t it? At times doesn’t the devil want to jump into your head and make you say to yourself, “Why wouldn’t God do ABC or D when I am asking him to do it? Why is he taking so long? Why doesn’t he do this? This is what I desperately want. This is what I desperately need!”

Sometimes it is going to depend on who we surround ourselves with, isn’t it? When we pour out our worries and our troubles, if we are pouring them out to someone that isn’t a believer in Christ, they might offer us some advice that isn’t necessarily God-pleasing. They might point us to some kind of action that is wrong to get what we want or what we want accomplished. They might point us to other things that would drive a bigger wedge between us and our God.

Jairus had the benefit of having Jesus right at his side giving him the perfect advise at the perfect time—“*Don’t be afraid; just believe*. I still have your best interests at heart and I will still give you the things that are best for your soul and for your daughter’s soul.” If only we had that, right?

Isn’t that where you and I come in? Whether it is for ourselves or people that we love, aren’t we Christ to them? We carry the name “Christian,” aren’t we a little Christ to

them? Don't you and I have that Word of God in our hearts and our minds, in our hands at least, so that we can offer Christian encouragement to people that are worried and wondering. We ourselves—we can turn to God's Word and to his promises or to a fellow Christian who maybe has a better grasp of Scripture than we do and say, "Help me with this. I am struggling. Lead me back to the cross and let me see again how much God loves me and how he has taken away my sins and help me to believe what my eyes aren't seeing right now." God tells us he strengthens that faith through Word and Sacrament. Sometimes you and I are his voice and his hands and we, like Jairus, can hear him say to us, "*Don't be afraid; just believe*" as we spend time in that Word and as we grow in that Word—whether it is at worship or alone or in Bible study or in devotional time or whatever it is, but believing, being stronger in faith comes from the Spirit working in the means of grace.

So get into it with one another, encourage one another, but faith that takes away fear comes through those means.

I don't know what Jairus was thinking. Scripture doesn't focus on him at all after that first request, does it? We don't hear another word from his lips. But if you put yourself in his shoes as he is going to the house, can you imagine how gut wrenching that is? When you get to your house, and already it must have been some time since this took place because there are already all these professional mourners there. Even the poorest person, you read from the time of Jesus, even the poorest person was expected to provide a food plate and a couple of mourners when someone like their spouse died. Jairus, this well-to-do man, we hear that the house was full of mourners already that are there mourning in a way that their culture would with wailing and with other things and all these various things to express their grief. So when they get there, Jesus has only taken three along—Peter, James and John (and Jairus). He sent the others aside, the crowd that was pressing on him that wanted to hear him teach and see him do things. He gets to the house and tells those mourners, "*Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep*" (Mark 5:39). He is not saying she is really not dead, but he is saying this death is temporary, just like God at various times in Scripture speaks of our death as just the sleep of our bodies because our souls immediately go to be with the Lord in heaven. He tells them not to worry and their reaction doesn't quite seem appropriate for a place of mourning, does it? Jesus' statement seems so ridiculous that they laugh at him. These people are mourners. They know death. They have seen death. They know what death looks like. "Who are you telling us she is asleep? What kind of nutcase are you?"

So Jesus has to get rid of them also. He sends them out of the room. He goes in to where Jairus' daughter, the 12-year-old girl, who is lying there on her very death bed. Jairus had asked him to lay his hands on her and she will be healed. Jesus doesn't do that, does he? He never lays his hand on her head or anything like that. It said he takes her by the hand and he says to her, "*Talitha kum!*" (which means, "*Little girl, I say to you, get up!*") (Mark 5:41). And she does. She stands up. Two simple Aramaic words, holding her hand, and he demonstrates the power of his almighty Word as he brings someone back from the dead to the living with two Aramaic words—"*Talitha kum!*"

Even if you can't speak Aramaic and you've heard those words before, they probably sounded familiar when you heard them again now, didn't they? It sticks with you—the incredible power that Jesus has. It would be frightening if he used that power in light of our sin. If he looked at our sin and said to us, “Little girl; little boy go away from me! Get out of my presence! I don't want you near me! I am Holy. You are not, to hell with you!” He has the power, but his love uses his power to save. His love led him to set aside that divine power so that he lived in our place and then died in our place. His love sent the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament into our hearts so that we would know that even when the day comes when you and I lie on our death bed, it is not the end. It is the gate to heaven.

Isn't that what we remind ourselves all the time? We have a special Sunday in the church year even, Saints Triumphant, where we celebrate this truth—that even in death we, who are in Christ, conquer. We are victorious! *“Don't be afraid; just believe.”* Even when our eyes see the death of someone who is in Christ and we say, “It's a loss. Sin has won. Our hearts confess the truth—No! Christ has won. He was victorious over death in that person's place and heaven is now theirs.”

Don't be afraid. Believe what God has promised and keep on believing it. That is why we spend so much time encouraging each other with the Word because here is where we meet a Savior who not only has the desire to deliver us from our great threats, but he has the ability to deliver us also.